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Lille And The Dutch Revolt: Urban Stability In An Era Of Revolution, 1500-1582

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Conclusion

Stability in revolution

The right of revolution is the obverse of the duty of obedience; the explanation of revolution the obverse of the explanation of stability.¹

Repeated mass violence directed against the institutions and personnel of the established church, armed insurrection designed to topple the existing government, experiments with new political and religious forms – all this and much more suggests that the Dutch Revolt lends itself well to analysis informed by the scholarship on collective action. To be sure, this literature was developed to explain change by investigation of the behavior of determinate groups in pursuit of common goals. But for the reasons alluded to in Freeman's observation just quoted, it can also help the student of stability account for the weakness or absence of such behavior. What follows draws upon this body of concepts, first to identify the critical factors inhibiting collective action in Lille, and then to specify the conditions that fostered it in other cities.²

Before examining the various urban histories, it will be useful to define and briefly outline the elements in collective action analysis relevant to this study. *Common interests* are the basis on which groups form to take action. They may be oriented either toward gaining new benefits or toward defending long-accepted rights and privileges. *Organization* is the process of increasing the common identity – the consciousness –

¹ Michael Freeman, "Review Article: Theories of Revolution," *British Journal of Political Science* 2 (1972):339.

² I have found most helpful Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution*, and Rod Aya, "Theories of Revolution Reconsidered: Contrasting Models of Collective Violence," *Theory and Society* 8 (1979):1-38.

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and unifying structure among members of a group so it can act on its interests. Through *mobilization*, a group comes to control resources that will enable it to implement its members' common interests. *Opportunities* or *threats* are perceptions by groups that encourage or impel them to act, whereas *facilitation* and *repression*, measures taken by those in power, contribute to or prevent groups from acting.

Social relations arising from economic pursuits often create common interests, consciousness, and structures. But scholars of collective action argue that interest groups also form on the basis of religion, politics, residence – anything, in short, that generates both a shared situation perceived as such by its protagonists and a shared understanding of rights and responsibilities that mandate action. Thus collective action is frequently – and most successfully – undertaken not by single groups but by coalitions. In these alliances, the links among groups powerfully affect the ways in which common interests are construed and articulated, the forms of organization devised, the possibilities for mobilizing, and the environment in which any undertaking occurs.

Fissures within the existing government are crucial for the development of all components of collective action. Splits of this sort can, in particular, lead to alliances between contenders and a faction of the government; they can make the authorities unwilling or unable to use sufficient force to crush challenges; or they can be accompanied by the breakdown of normal forms of legitimation. Any manner of specific issue can provoke such breaches. But they are often grounded in social and economic change, and this at the same time tends to weaken the controls that help preserve the existing order in normal times. Finally, collective action is not, according to most scholars, predicated upon the existence of conscious revolutionary groups pursuing new or expanded interests. On the contrary, an intent to implement forward-looking radical change is rarely present at, nor is it necessary for, the outbreak of revolt. Much more common are conservative, reactive, defensive movements. Typically, they aim to protect existing interests against changes caused or condoned by the political authorities.

I

The policing measures taken by successive Magistrats and governors in response to immediate crises have understandably loomed large in Part

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Two, where the atypicality and weakness of viable collective action has been a dominant theme of the analysis. These steps were successful in stabilizing Lille during the revolt, however, only because of arrangements – examined in Part One – that had been instituted over the previous decades and elaborated as needed thereafter. Begun piecemeal in response to currently pressing needs and demands, over time these arrangements came to constitute the crucial elements of a social and political order that served to dampen rather than promote disruption and rebellion. They did not, of course, predetermine the city's behavior, but they endowed Lille with a structural tendency to stability. Not only was there little pressure for religious or political change, but movements that did emerge lacked effective means for realizing their objectives. In particular, artisans and Protestants, who mounted significant challenges in other cities, were denied the resources needed to play a similar role in Lille.

Small commodity production and the municipal welfare system were of central importance to Lille's stability. Taken together, they channeled the growth of the light-textile industry to the advantage of a large group of petty masters with a firm stake in the developing social and economic structure. They also curbed the potentially destabilizing emergence of either a polarized class structure or intractable material grievances. Because, moreover, the municipal ruling class dominated corporate and charitable institutions and repeatedly intervened in the urban social economy, artisan interests were shaped by and mediated through the political elite. Hence ideas and practices that questioned the existing order not only lacked a viable social base but faced the hostility of both the great majority of artisans and the ruling group. Innovation could therefore be stigmatized as economically unjustified, socially disruptive, and morally indefensible.

At the same time that the structures of Lille's economy hindered the growth of an oppositional identity among urban masters, they also divided key groups of artisans in the city from their counterparts in the countryside. The social and economic experiences of textile artisans in Lille differed sharply from those of their counterparts in villages. Whereas urban weavers operated within the small commodity system, rural producers were much more likely to be dependent wage earners, typically employed in some sort of putting-out arrangement. In addition, a shared antagonism toward the development of rural textiles bound

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together ruling class and artisans in the city. The large body of urban weavers in particular objected to the emergence of competition in the countryside. After all, they benefited from the existing asymmetrical regional division of labor that assigned less remunerative preparatory work to rural areas, while reserving more lucrative jobs to the city. Not surprisingly, then, the urban monopolies that underlay this unequal distribution of tasks joined the interests of Magistrat and craftsman.

Besides foreclosing the emergence of autonomous artisan consciousness, organization, and mobilization within Lille and on a regional basis, small commodity production and the Common Fund also restricted the urban audience for Protestantism. They perpetuated viable corporate and civic institutions and ideology on the one hand, and they minimized change and hardship on the other. To be sure, an organized Reformed community did arise in sixteenth-century Lille, and local threats combined with opportunities created by national and regional incidents to stimulate some mobilization. But Lille's Protestants were unable to profit even when a broad political, religious, social, and economic crisis enveloped the Netherlands. Once their merchant element withdrew or fell silent, the Reformed were cut off from any access to urban political resources that might have eased the repression visited upon them.

Finally, Lille's social and economic structures discouraged rural and urban dissenters from forging strong common interests and viable coalitions. As it evolved, of course, the Protestant movement emphasized cooperation among fellow believers no matter where their place of residence. What is more, Reformed religion took root most firmly in the rural cloth communities of northern Walloon Flanders. Yet the continuing development of small commodity relations of production and welfare services meant that the life experiences of most Lillois remained consonant with the beliefs and practices of the traditional faith. So during the summer of 1566, when Reformers were pulling down the symbols of the old church and raising the new throughout Walloon Flanders, "the common people" (*la commune*) of Lille were "very agitated" about religion, the Magistrat reported.³ But their activities were designed to stop heretics, not assist them.

³ Response to Tournai's Protestants, printed in Verheyden, "Chronique de Gaiffier," pp. 81-2.

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Over the long term, sustained economic growth provided a favorable environment for stability. As we have seen, however, it was the magistrates who enacted the arrangements that hobbled the emergence and mobilization of contending groups and then uniformly and effectively crushed any that managed to appear. There were a number of reasons why Lille's ruling class was able to intervene decisively over many tumultuous decades and indeed to redouble its efforts as the economic cycle became more erratic, inflation more pressing, and Protestant agitation more extensive after midcentury. To begin with, the city's political and economic elites overlapped considerably, the result of homogeneous social composition enhanced by intermarriage and dense networks of business relationships. The cohesion of the magistracy was further strengthened by rotation in office and the constitution of an informal inner circle, both of which encouraged unity founded on a community of interests as well as long acquaintanceship. In addition, the formation of factions that might have entered alliances with challengers from outside the government was discouraged by the absence of an entrenched patriciate and the consequent newness of the ruling class. Like the merchant class that provided the bulk of its members, Lille's governing group remained open to those who acquired the proper social and economic credentials. At the same time, the frustration of artisan entrepreneurial efforts removed the possibility that a wealthy and strategic group might emerge to contest not merely specific policies but the entire distribution of political power that bred them.

Conversely, the lack of corporate participation in city government meant that artisans had no political space of their own in which they might have formulated and enunciated demands distinct from, and perhaps in conflict with, those of the governing elite. Thus when direct challenges to the Magistrat were voiced in the late 1570s, they evoked no response within this solidary ruling class or for that matter among any other organized group of townspeople, save, on one occasion, some militia officers. In this instance, moreover, the fact that the municipal government rather than guilds or some other body controlled the civic companies allowed the authorities to nip the protest in the bud and regain the initiative. So lacking any politically significant resources – such as divisions among the authorities, allies for a coalition, or armed force – the contenders were quickly isolated and defeated. Even the

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Estates-General, to whom the insurgents appealed for aid, quickly recognized that the balance of power overwhelmingly favored the established authorities.

The municipal government could also act effectively because its members remained closely attuned to urban society. On the one hand, very few of the merchants who dominated the Magistrat abandoned trade. On the other, aldermen and councillors – many of them drawn from the inner circle of the ruling class – sat on the bodies administering the textile crafts and the Bourse commune, where they learned at first hand about important issues. Probably it was this experience that made a merchant-controlled municipal government willing not merely to countenance but to construct and enforce small commodity production, sacrificing probable economic gain for social and political purposes. In turn, successful measures legitimated the Magistrat's rule while extending its control.

The same features that promoted the Loi's cohesion and secured its local hegemony likewise permitted it to retain a substantial degree of autonomy from successive central governments. The Magistrat was not a policy innovator and indeed usually sought to work with the regime in power, particularly in order to secure or extend economic and jurisdictional benefits. At the same time, however, it is clear that Lille's magistrates were consistently and firmly resolved to defend municipal privileges, the established faith, and their own authority, and would resist central-state measures that threatened any of these. These commitments explain not only their stubborn resistance to confiscation and rejection of the Tenth and Twentieth Pennies, but also their eventual break with the Estates-General.

On occasion, of course, the Magistrat did face challenges, whether from would-be entrepreneurs, Protestants, or Zealots. But in consequence of arrangements implemented largely by the ruling class, contenders never managed to assemble the resources needed to mobilize successfully and capitalize on dissidence. Only intervention from the outside promised any real breakthrough for the proponents of collective action for change in sixteenth-century Lille. Yet in the absence of any viable popular movement within the city, such attempts were doomed to rapid failure. In fact, as the popular vigilantism of summer 1566 intimated, and the crowds that greeted insurgent initiatives in 1578 strikingly demonstrated, it was the ruling class, not a rebellion, that could

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summon citizens into the streets and squares of Lille to enforce its program.

II

Lille's magistrates were scarcely the only ones who actively sought the stability that would preserve their rule and what they construed as their city's best interests. But to judge by the available studies – which to be sure have focused on towns where some sort of significant collective action did occur – the environment accounting for Lille's situation was rarely matched. The scholarly literature reveals the existence of two groups of towns, which may be called revolutionary centers and coup cities. Each exhibited a different pattern of interaction among material conditions, social and economic structure, religious ferment, political institutions, and magisterial conduct, and each was subject to distinct forms of mobilization for collective action.

Revolutionary centers lay mainly in the southern provinces of the Netherlands. Here broadly based, prolonged collective action effected political and/or religious change for a significant period of time, though never permanently. Among these centers were to be found the major light-cloth towns – apart from Lille. But it was the great cities of Brabant, notably Antwerp and Brussels, as well as Ghent in Flanders, that saw the most sustained and far-reaching revolutionary developments.⁴

With the partial exception of Ghent, these towns underwent rapid economic growth across the early sixteenth century. In all of them, too, the long period of expansion terminated soon after midcentury in a decade or more of stagnation ending in harsh crises. But if their economic and material histories resembled Lille's in these respects, the absence of viable protective structures or adequate ameliorative and regulative institutions crucially distinguished them. Ghent was further

⁴ The following draws on Hocquet, *Tournai et le Tournais au XVI^e siècle*; Paul Rolland, *Histoire de Tournai* (Tournai and Paris, 1957); *Histoire de Valenciennes*, ed. Henri Platelle (Lille, 1982); Clark, "An Urban Study during the Revolt of the Netherlands"; Van der Wee, *Rise of the Antwerp Market*; idem, "The Economy as a Factor in the Start of the Revolt"; *Antwerpen in de XVI^e eeuw*; Hugo Soly, "Nijverheid en kapitalisme te Antwerpen in de 16^e eeuw," in *Album Charles Verlinden* (Ghent, 1975); idem, "Economische vernieuwing en sociale weerstand. De betekenis en aspiraties der Antwerpse middenklasse in de 16^e eeuw," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 83 (1970):520–35; idem, *Urbanisme en Kapitalisme te Antwerpen in de 16^e eeuw* (Brussels, 1977); *Histoire de Bruxelles*, ed. Mina Martens (Toulouse, 1979); Alexandre Henne and Alphonse Wauters, *Histoire de Bruxelles*, 3 vols. (Brussels, 1845); Hans Van Werveke, *Gand, esquisse d'histoire sociale* (Brussels, 1946); Victor Fris, *Histoire de Gand*, 2nd ed. (Brussels, 1930).

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set apart by a combination of commercial growth – principally in grain and linens – and industrial decline, strikingly evident in woolen drapery. But in the social results of economic development, Ghent did resemble the other revolutionary centers. A substantial middling artisanry suddenly faced the end of its accustomed prosperity in the 1560s, while impoverished wage earners became increasingly desperate. To be sure, even in new and less regulated crafts most enterprises were small, and even in Antwerp there is some evidence of support for masters' demands for safeguards against innovators.

Nevertheless, it was clear that the traditional social and economic order was under attack. Particularly disturbing to those threatened by such developments, the magistracies typically failed to act or even took the capitalists' side. Complaints against entrepreneurs and authorities alike began to stir artisans – already in 1554, riots in Antwerp revealed deep dissatisfaction – and led them to countenance joint action with the wage earners they normally despised.⁵

These processes of change and the grievances to which they gave rise had the added result of making artisans and wage earners more receptive to Protestantism, especially when religious dissenters offered charity that municipalities were unable or unwilling to extend. The groupings thus formed also found indispensable coalition partners among political contenders. The magistracies that held sway over these cities were closed oligarchies consisting largely of rentiers, nobles, and professionals – a social composition that may explain their unimaginative responses to artisan concerns. What is more, the ruling strata were widely, if not always accurately, perceived as doing the bidding of the central government to the detriment of municipal privileges and finances.

Among those challenging the city governments were groups excluded from decision making yet at the same time enjoying access to significant institutional and coercive resources that fostered mobilization while helping parry repression. In Brussels, for instance, both the patrician *lignages* and the guild and citizen elite, grouped into *nations*, had had

⁵ Cf. the situation in the great West Flanders say-cloth center of Hondschoote. After coming to dominate local government, from about 1540 merchant entrepreneurs were allowed both to ignore previously enforced limits on loom ownership and to move in the direction of vertical concentration by taking over several stages of production. All this helped generate animosity that contributed to broad participation in iconoclastic riots. See Emile Coornaert, *Un centre industriel d'autrefois. La draperie-sayetterie d'Hondschoote (XIV^e–XVIII^e siècles)* (Rennes, 1930).

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their authority curbed by princely officials while nonetheless remaining part of municipal government. The guilds at Antwerp, which had become increasingly conscious of their rising economic importance, were strongly represented on the supervisory Broad and Monday Councils. The *Conseil particulier* of Valenciennes, established in 1497 in response to merchant complaints about the corruption of the Magistrat, conducted biweekly reviews of the aldermen's activities, and it controlled the civic militia. Named in principle by the sovereign, in practice the members of the council were coopted and served repeatedly, endowing the body with a great deal of unity and solidarity. At Tournai, the *ban-nières* (organizations that included every guild as well as all other citizens), and at Ghent the "members" (three bodies dominated by guilds, in particular the drap weavers) had within recent memory lost power to paid oligarchies of the rich, appointed and closely supervised by the central government. The corporate groups continued, however, to have charge of the militia.

Under these conditions, central-government policies – preeminently though not exclusively the persecution of Protestants – not only failed utterly but laid bare fissures within the local political order that were quickly exploited by insurgents. Common interests – largely defensive though also, in the case of religious reformers, innovative in nature – thus engendered organized groups that allied into mobilized coalitions. Armed with strategic ideological, social, and material resources, these alliances responded forcefully to threats and took full advantage of the distinctive opportunities arising in each city. At the same time, however, significant differences in constituency, goals, and resources existed among the various partners in these coalitions. Over time, these divergences generated a process of radicalization, as each group attempted to dominate the new regime. But they ended in internecine strife, mutual exhaustion, and acceptance of Spanish rule, whether achieved by military defeat or by negotiation.

In coup cities, collective action to effect religious and/or political change occurred but was less broadly based and intense than in the revolutionary centers. Thus success came only with aid from outside. Coups occurred principally during the second phase of revolt, when Beggar assaults with the assistance of accomplices within took over towns, most durably in Holland and Zeeland. But they also took place

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during the period of Estates-General rule, when exiled Protestants and partisans of William of Orange patronized or provoked risings that they then helped to carry through.⁶

Most cities that underwent coups were experiencing economic decline, considerably sharpened in the period just preceding the risings, and this process caused bitter social tensions. Admittedly, in some towns attempts had been made to establish new industries (Ypres, for example, tried says and other light cloth), but most of these efforts had miscarried. At Bruges, a recently created fustian industry initially met with success, but after midcentury its output was characterized by substantial oscillations superimposed on a stagnant or even downward trend. In order to stimulate economic growth, moreover, urban authorities usually dismantled existing regulations that protected small producers or, as at Douai, vacillated so much that in the end they managed to satisfy neither masters nor entrepreneurs. Worse, none of the towns had adequate welfare systems to cope with widespread downward mobility and impoverishment. Clerical or corporate opposition derailed projects similar to Lille's Common Fund in several cities; continued economic decay bankrupted reforms that had been implemented elsewhere. The resulting misery provided Orangists and Protestants with a constituency and an issue that they were not slow to exploit.

Exclusive, ingrown oligarchies, city magistracies were also perceived as all too accommodating to central government pressures – notably, in Holland and Zeeland at least, in regard to Alba's taxes – even though

⁶ The following discussion is based on J. C. Boogman, "De overgang van Gouda, Dordrecht, Leiden en Delft in de zomer van het jaar 1572," *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 57 (1942):81–112; T. S. Jansma, "De betekenis van Dordrecht en Rotterdam omstreeks het midden der zestiende eeuw," *De Economist* 92 (1943):212–50; N. W. Posthumus, *Geschiedenis van de Leidsche Lakenindustrie*, 2 vols. in 3 parts (The Hague, 1908–39); P. J. Blok, *Geschiedenis eener Hollandsche Stad*, 4 vols. (The Hague, 1910–18) [on Leiden]; C. C. Hibben, *Gouda in Revolt. Particularism and Pacifism in the Revolt of the Netherlands 1572–1588* (Utrecht, 1983); DuPlessis, "Urban Stability in the Netherlands Revolution" [on Douai]; J. A. Van Houtte, *Bruges. Essai d'histoire urbaine* (Brussels, 1967); idem, *De geschiedenis van Brugge* (Tiel, 1982); J. Vermaut, "Structural Transformation in a Textile Centre: Bruges from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century," in *The Rise and Decline of Urban Industries in Italy and in the Low Countries (Late Middle Ages – Early Modern Times)*, ed. Herman Van der Wee (Leuven, 1988), pp. 187–205; J. De Mey, "De 'mislukte' aanpassingen van de nieuwe draperie, de saainijverheid en de lichte draperie te Ieper," *Tijdschrift voor geschiedenis* 63 (1950):222–35; Raymond Van Uytven, *Stadsfinanciën en Stadseconomie te Leuven van de XIIIe tot het einde der XVIe eeuw* (Brussels, 1961); Offermans, *Arbeid en Levensstandaard*; Rudolf Kolman, *De Reductie van Nijmegen (1591), voor- en naspel* (Groningen, 1952); Pirenne, *'s-Hertogenbosch*; Decavele, *Dageraad van de Reformatie*. Cf. A. J. M. Beenakker, *Breda in de eerste storm van de opstand. Van Ketterij tot beeldenstorm 1545–1569* (Tilburg, 1971).

they tended to drag their feet on the issue of persecuting heretics. Corporations had no institutional presence in Holland and Zeeland municipalities, although elsewhere they had some voice in town affairs. But no matter what the reigning institutional arrangements, militias were generally independent of the town government, even when not under guild control, and they drew their membership largely from artisans. Additionally, the civic companies began to take a keener interest in their traditional role as guarantors of urban privileges now that magistracies were perceived to be laggard in this regard.

In coup towns, then, opposition groups had urgent dissatisfactions, and resources existed that would facilitate collective action. But both individually and even in coalition the contenders were too small in number and too divided in interests to win on their own. Because many artisans in these towns produced for local and regional markets, social and economic change affected or threatened only a minority. Even in the luxury drapery trades in the Flemish cities, in fact, corporations had retained most of their traditional religious and social attributes as well as protective rules, so new ideas and practices had made few inroads among the artisans.

Hence outside aid was essential for challengers to prevail. It might come from Beggars and exiles, as in Holland and Zeeland, from Ghent Calvinists and revolutionaries, as in Flanders, or from the troops of the Estates-General, as in Brabant. Hence, too, radical political experiments did not follow coups. Admittedly, many individual magistrates were purged on grounds of religion or hostility to Orangism, but neither the social composition nor the structure of the municipal regimes was altered. It was the weaknesses of the city governments, and their reliance on external support, that made successful coups possible; it was the weaknesses of contenders, and their reliance on external force, that limited the coups' effects. Even in the northern towns, where a new state and religious order were introduced, the dominant groups perpetuated their hegemony by exchanging Habsburg for Orangist tutelage.

Amsterdam formed something of an exception to other coup centers in that it had experienced rapid economic growth during the first two-thirds of the sixteenth century.⁷ Yet the results of its development re-

⁷ See A. J. M. Brouwer Ancher and Joh. C. Breen, "De Doleantie van een deel der burgerij van Amsterdam tegen den Magistraat dier stad in 1564 en 1565," *Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap* 24 (1902):59-200; H. Brugmans, *Opkomst en Bloei van Amsterdam* (Amster-

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sembled those prevailing in the other towns in which coups took place. On the one side, traditional artisan crafts organized in guilds subordinate to and excluded from the city government remained dominant; on the other, harbingers of structural change were beginning to appear in some industrial sectors. In addition, during the 1560s opposition to the long-entrenched, resolutely Catholic "Dirkist" oligarchy emerged in the form of the "Doleanten" party. Resentful of their exclusion from the seats of municipal power despite possessing comparable if not greater wealth than the incumbents, the Doleanten also suspected the Dirkists of failing adequately to protect the vitally important grain trade. Further, the Doleanten found the current magistracy too subservient to Brussels's dictates on religious matters and insufficiently heedful of municipal privileges.

To be sure, despite serious iconoclasm in 1566, and a near-revolt by several thousand townspeople early the next year, the insurgent movement lacked sufficient common interests to prevail at the time. But a decade of severe depression, which the Dirkists failed to manage satisfactorily, corroded loyalties to the point that the citizen militia refused to defend the government during its final climacteric. Even then, however, Amsterdam's old regime retained substantial human, ideological, and repressive resources, and it was only overthrown in 1578 thanks to assistance provided by returning exiles.

III

Although well aware of the defensive aspects of the Dutch Revolt, Henri Pirenne presented it as essentially progressive in nature, the clash of protagonists pursuing forward-looking interests. He depicted a royal government bent on centralizing and unifying a nation; capitalist classes driven to overcome their alienation from the existing order through political, social, religious, and ideological innovation; and a bold new faith willing to employ novel forms of organization and discipline to break sharply with established belief and practice. Scholars of collective

dam, 1911); J. E. Elias, *Geschiedenis van het Amsterdamse Regentenpatriciaat* (The Hague, 1923); J. G. van Dillen, *Amsterdam in 1585* (Amsterdam, 1941); Henk F. K. van Nierop, *Beeldenstorm en burgerlijk verzet in Amsterdam 1566-1567* (Nijmegen, 1978); James D. Tracy, "A Premature Counter-Reformation: The Dirkist Government of Amsterdam, 1538-1578," *Journal of Religious History* 13 (1984):150-67.

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action, in contrast, maintain that much radical and even revolutionary action occurs in order to prevent change, not to promote it.

The evidence presented in this book indicates that it was the interaction of both forward-looking and defensive forces that gave rise to the Dutch Revolt, at least in the cities. Some central government policies, most notably those directed toward building a more integrated state, were innovatory. Yet the Habsburgs – like their Protestant adversaries – clung stubbornly to the long-established belief that a single church must enjoy a religious monopoly in their domains. On their side, many municipal governments were devising new institutions or subordinating existing ones, thereby enhancing their control over urban populations. Almost without exception, however, they struggled to protect existing rights and privileges against Brussels's religious and financial policies. Those that failed to do so faced a risky loss of legitimacy at home, if not rebellion or even overthrow.

Again, it was neither the frustrated expectations nor the absolute impoverishment of social classes newly generated by capitalist development that alone gave strength to urban protest in the Netherlands. Rather, it was these in tandem with portents of structural change troubling small and medium producers at a time when steep inflation, market instability, and insufficient ameliorative systems increased this pivotal group's vulnerability to entrepreneurial initiatives. What mattered was less the presence of proletarians than the threat of proletarianization. Finally, Protestant demands for and steps toward the open exercise of their faith represented a break with rather than a continuation of the status quo. Yet if some people may have harkened to the new message because of unsettling changes in their work or social experiences, many others found the Reformed religion appealing because it expressed their fear of change. For their part, Protestants resembled not so much a mass movement – or even a disciplined revolutionary vanguard – as a heterogeneous alliance responding to a constantly shifting constellation of threats and opportunities. In and of themselves, the Reformed contributed to the outbreak of the revolt by exposing and exploiting weak points in the political system and its repressive apparatus. But to succeed in attaining their goals, even in part, Protestants had to form coalitions with groups with an essentially reactive orientation.

This book also maintains that it was a combination of defensive and forward-looking measures that permitted the achievement of stability in

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sixteenth-century Lille. Artisan mobilization was not inhibited because the city fathers acquiesced in extensive innovation or because they attempted to maintain a static social order. Instead, it was blocked because the Magistrat had recourse to selective adaptation, psychological as well as material. More generally, this book claims that while powerful economic, social, and religious currents created the potential for revolt in the mid-sixteenth-century Netherlands, it was the political response of the local ruling class that determined whether such an outcome would in fact be realized. As the example of Lille shows, even an oligarchic magistracy pursuing the repressive policy favored by an increasingly unpopular central government could stay firmly in control. What it had to do – and what few other urban governments apparently managed to accomplish – was at once resolutely to address the perceived sources of discontent and to tighten controls over the populace.

Lille's ruling class did not make its history entirely, or even largely, under conditions of its own choosing. The city's economic growth was – and this became painfully obvious during recurrent crises – dependent on conditions within a competitive international market over which its people, even its greatest merchants, had very little control. Similarly, the diffusion of religious dissent was a function of commercial routes, technological developments, and cultural evolution that the Magistrat could not interrupt. Even such favorable factors as electoral procedures or the recent formation of the urban political class were legacies that the Loi could turn to its benefit but had not created. What Lille's political leadership must be credited with is the ability to recognize that it could reproduce both stability and its own hegemony through discriminating intervention, particularly in social and economic affairs, that balanced economic considerations with broadly based cultural traditions and ideological commitments.

In the literature on the Dutch Revolt – indeed, in the scholarship on revolution as a whole – Lille thus continues to stand out as singular, a stark contrast to the centers of iconoclasm, resistance, and rebellion that have understandably received most attention. But its example suggests the advisability of studying locations where mobilization was checked, insurgency contained, and collective action blocked, if we wish to understand both revolution and its counterpart stability.